

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held
on Thursday 26 June 2008, Cardiff

Present: Sam Younger (SY) Chair
Max Caller (MC)
Ian Kelsall (IK)
John McCormick (JM)
Henrietta Campbell (HC)
Karamjit Singh (KS)

Peter Wardle (PW)
Clare Ettinghausen (CE)
Stephen Rooney (SR)
Lisa Klein (LK)
Carolyn Hughes (CH)
Andrew Scallan (AS)

Bob Posner (BP)
Vera Markos (VM) Minutes
Kay Jenkins (KJ) - Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9
Karen Quintmere (KQ) - Items 1, 2, 3, 4
Tom Hawthorn (TH) - Items 1, 2, 3, 4
Andy O'Neill (AO'N) - Items 1, 2, 3, 4
Tony Stafford (TS) - Items 3 - 9

1. Minutes

- 1.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2008 (EC50/08).
- 1.2 With regard to agenda item 1.2 AS noted that the Commission had yet to receive a response from the leaders of the four Councils the Commission had written to that had failed to respond to Commission request for performance standards data.
- 1.3 With regard to agenda item 3 SY noted that on 24 June the Commission had received the Scotland Office response to the Gould report.
- 1.4 With regard to agenda item 6.3 SY noted that the meeting with the Lord Chancellor to discuss individual electoral registration had been postponed.

2. 1 May 2008 election reports

- 2.1 AS presented the three reports relating to the administration of the local government elections in England and Wales, and the Mayoral and Greater London Authority elections in London. AS noted that overall the elections ran smoothly.
- 2.2 The Commission welcomed the report on the local elections in England 2008 and agreed a debate/direction.
- 2.3 The Commission approved the report on the local elections in Wales 2008 subject to a number of clarifications and amendments.
- 2.4 The Commission approved the report on the Greater London Authority elections subject to a number of clarifications and amendments.
- 2.5 The Commission noted that the plan was to publish the reports on 18 July.

3. Examination of electoral administration in the UK - reports

- 3.1 AS outlined the findings of the project as presented in the two reports: Electoral administration in the United Kingdom – moving forward and Electoral administration in Scotland – moving forward.
- 3.2 The Commission agreed that the responses to the consultation showed that whilst there is a further debate to be had on the future direction of electoral administration in the UK the recommendations a number of practical changes could be implemented in the meantime.
- 3.3 The Commission also discussed the issue of how best to strengthen coordination of electoral administration in Scotland taking into account the Gould recommendation for the establishment of Chief Returning Officer (CRO). The Commission agreed to take forward the 'convener' model proposed with a power of direction. It was agreed that a further paper be brought to the 10 July Commission meeting.

4. Consultation on draft performance standards for EROs – review of responses and proposed amendments

- 4.1 TH provided a further update of responses received and noted that overall the responses to the draft performance standards for EROs had been positive. TH informed that following the review of consultation comments the Performance Standards Team would be recommending lowering the overall number of performance standards for EROs from 12 to 11. TH noted that the final proposed performance standards for EROs would be brought to the Commission meeting on 10 July for approval.

4.2 The Commission welcomed the update and commended the team for the widespread support it had received from stakeholders to the draft performance standards for EROs.

5. Response to the Government's proposals on party finance and expenditure in the UK

5.1 The Commission reconfirmed that the previous Commission statement in 2006 highlighting the principles that should underpin any system of party funding remained valid.

5.2 Following a discussion of each of the issues highlighted in the chapters of the White Paper, the Commission agreed to focus its response on future powers and sanctions for the Commission and on the proposed changes to the Commission's governance arrangements.

5.3 The Commission agreed to review a revised version of the response to the White Paper in order for sign off and publication by 4 July 2008.

6. Standardising statements of accounts for parties and accounting units

6.1 TS presented the proposals to introduce new guidance and regulations relating to the submission of statement of accounts by political parties and their accounting units. TS noted that the new guidance and regulations should improve the quality and consistency of the statements of accounts and also incorporate recent changes to legislation (Electoral Administration Act 2006). Training would be provided to parties and accounting units. TS informed that the proposed timetable is tight for taking changes forward following consultation if new regulations are to inform the preparation of accounts covering the 2009 financial year.

6.2 The Commission discussed the timing of the consultation and requested that the consultation be published in early July to allow for discussions with parties and accounting units as soon as possible.

7. Corporate performance report - April 2007 to March 2008

7.1 VM noted that the report was the first end-of-year performance report against the revised version of the rolling five-year Corporate Plan. The report focused on the performance against the 38 activities set out in the plan and showed that the Commission had successfully achieved the majority of planned activity. PW noted that performance against the five-year Corporate Plan key success measures had been reported in the Annual Report (handout of relevant section of the Annual Report provided).

7.2 The Commission noted the corporate performance report for 2007-08.

8. Adoption of 2007-08 resource accounts

8.1 CH noted that the Audit Committee had considered the 2007-08 resource accounts at its meeting on 23 June. IK, Chair of the Audit Committee, provided an update of the key issues raised at the meeting by the NAO and stated that there are no outstanding issues. CH noted that the resource accounts would be laid in the House of Commons before parliamentary recess.

8.2 The Commission adopted the 2007-08 resource accounts.

9. Party and Election Finance update

9.1 The Commission received an update from LK on the PEF activities and performance during the month of May 2008.

10. AoB

10.1 SR noted that the new Commission website was scheduled to be launched on 30 June 2008.

10.2 MC noted that the Boundary Committee for England consultations on Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk structural reviews would be published on 7 July.